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Discussion paper contributed by the women major group**

Summary

Current low levels of participation by women in forest management decision-making and governance are issues of major concern to the women major group. Obstacles and constraints faced by women include: degraded environments and poverty; low levels of awareness among policymakers and administrators of how gender issues affect forest management; limited numbers of women in decision-making roles; limited implementation of policies and legislation for gender equity and the inclusion of women; and insufficient female staff, mentors and networks in forestry institutions. More strategic concerted efforts and commitment by all actors engaged in sustainable forest management are needed to strengthen women's role in the processes and implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forest of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

In order to promote the adoption of action-oriented policy decisions for the non-legally binding instrument through 2015, the women major group proposes specific recommendations and activities as priority areas for action. They include initiatives for research, training, advocacy, policy inputs for gender mainstreaming, pilot projects that demonstrate collaboration between Governments and the women major group and media presentations showcasing successful initiatives.

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I. Introduction

1. In response to the non-legally binding instrument agreed to by Member States, and in support of the four global objectives on forests, the women major group would like to reiterate that the goals and objectives cannot be met without women's active engagement and leadership. Women are an integral part of implementation and their participation in the process is required to ensure ownership of the outcomes and effective action; women leaders have an important role to play in creating focused priorities for future action. As stressed by Ms. Daniela Simioni of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, at the meeting of the open-ended ad hoc expert group in New York, in December 2006, any new international instrument for sustainable forest management should consider the gender aspect, including household needs for wood fuel, employment and income opportunities for women and their involvement in reforestation and other conservation activities.

2. Over the past several years, the women major group has compiled priority areas for action and proposed achievable goals and targets in discussion papers submitted to the third, fourth and fifth sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests. In preparation for the seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the women major group has obtained the perspectives of women engaged in forest-related work at the community, national and international levels through a list of questions on obstacles and opportunities. Based on inputs received from Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management, the World Conservation Union (Eastern Africa), the gender and forestry research group of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, the Centre for International Forest Research, and women in Nepal and South Africa, the women major group would like to re-emphasize the critical importance of women's contributions to the implementation of the proposal for actions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests; and to implementing the various resolutions and decisions of the United Nations Forum on Forests; as well as to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and the four global objectives agreed to and negotiated during the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

3. To date, the women major group has been successful in ensuring that the experiences and concerns of women have been voiced and discussed at the United Nations Forum on Forests formal sessions and expert meetings to raise awareness of the barriers faced by women foresters, forestry students and community members and to describe successful initiatives that have achieved sustainable forest management and women's empowerment. They have all pointed to the need for structural changes within forestry organizations to address gender equality.

4. Specifically, the women major group is of the opinion that current levels of participation by women in forest management decision-making and governance are issues of major concern, and would like to see more strategic concerted efforts and commitment by Governments, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional networks, as well as relevant multilateral environmental agreements, instruments, processes and bodies of the United Nations system to strengthen women's role in such processes. The active engagement of women is imperative to ensure that the discussions at the seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests include women's perspectives and concerns.

II. Obstacles and constraints

5. The following obstacles and constraints to women's involvement in sustainable forest management have been identified, based on responses to the following questions: (a) what is the current situation of gender equity in your country in reference to forest management? Are women well represented in decision-making roles in community-level forest groups and in forestry institutions? Do women influence forest-related policies? and (b) what are the constraints to women's involvement in forest management at the community and institutional levels?

A. Degraded environments and poverty

6. The continuing degradation and pollution of the environment have far-reaching effects on the livelihoods of communities, particularly of indigenous women and women living in poverty. Gender inequality, environmental deterioration, poor health and poverty are self-reinforcing. Forest protection and conservation measures often add to the hardships of poor women by denying them access to the forest products they need for, inter alia, energy, food, medicine and livestock feed, while providing no alternatives for them to meet their families' basic needs, thus perpetuating the poverty cycle.

B. Lack of awareness

7. There is a lack of awareness of how gender issues affect forest management; while many policy recommendations link gender to the environment, development agencies and government departments have tended to overlook the roles of women in forestry and their effects on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

C. Few women in decision-making roles

8. The number of women in leadership positions in forestry institutions, especially at the international level, remains marginal; further, the marginalization of women in decisions on the governance of forest resources has resulted in their increased levels of poverty and hardship for those at the consumption end of the scale with limited options. Women who do attain positions of responsibility are often disempowered by male actors, often influencing them to leave the forest sector.

D. Policies and legislation for gender equity and women's inclusion

9. Despite the progress made in policies for gender equality over the last 20 years, implementation and action have been limited. Women influence policies only in significant ways when their participation and opinions are actively sought by policymakers. Within government policymaking, that is often done when funds and human resources so permit but, in general, the gender dimension is not actively or adequately considered. There is a serious lack of political commitment on the part of forestry authorities to monitor and evaluate implementation of gender-responsive

actions, which is of major concern as remedial action does not take gender dynamics sufficiently into account.

E. Insufficient personnel, mentors and networks

10. The number of women in forestry institutions is, to date, very low in most countries. There are many social and cultural reasons for that, and some Governments are attempting to counteract those causes through innovative recruitment, hiring and retention procedures. Still, women in such organizations are often marginalized and without networks and mentors that could strengthen their capacities and influence.

11. Major concerns and challenges faced by the women major group include:

(a) Insufficient commitment to issues of gender equality among environment-related institutions and donor agencies;

(b) Inadequate data and indicators for gender-related aspects of forestry policies and programmes;

(c) Paucity of women in forestry institutions to represent the interests of women within global-level processes;

(d) Lack of capacities within forestry institutions to design gender-responsive strategies.

12. To take on those concerns and challenges, the women major group wishes to suggest additional areas of need and concerted actions at the national, regional and international levels:

(a) Policy and legislation;

(b) Capacity-building for gender mainstreaming;

(c) Sustainable development activities for women in forest management;

(d) Research;

(e) Organizational change;

(f) Gender rights-based international cooperation in forestry;

(g) Recruitment of women in international forestry institutions.

13. The next phase of the non-legally binding instrument now requires that more significant attention and resources be devoted to gender issues and women's needs and contributions related to sustainable forest management, poverty alleviation and related topics such as health, so that such changes can be implemented. Towards that goal, the women major group offers cooperation, skills, knowledge and networks of women throughout the world to forge new paths by engaging women as equal partners in sustainable forest management.

III. Plans and proposed actions

14. To promote the adoption of action-oriented policy decisions for the non-legally binding instrument through 2015, the women major group hereby proposes

recommendations and activities as priority areas for action, based on responses to two questions posed to women in forestry: (a) how can the constraints be overcome by opening up spaces for women and through attention to gender equity in institutions and implementation? and (b) how can we ensure equitable practices in forestry institutions, considering aspects of organizational structure and culture?

A. Research for change

15. A recent meeting of women forestry professionals of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations working group on gender and forestry research endorsed a plan to assist the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to extend the research already completed by FAO on gender and forestry in Europe and North America[1] to other regions, including anglophone and francophone Africa and Asia. The group has proposed a project that aims to analyse current knowledge and information gaps regarding gender roles, responsibilities, access to and control over resources, challenges and opportunities among selected communities and professional organizations in Asian and African tropical forests; propose actions that promote gender-sensitive development among selected communities; and document best practices or successful cases of promoting gender-sensitive programmes in forestry. In relation to the forestry profession, the study will also document the current knowledge and information gaps of gender representation in forestry institutions in selected Asian and African countries; analyse key challenges to the present status; recommend actions for improving gender balance; and disseminate information. Specific outputs will include recommendations for improved inclusion of women in forest management and poverty reduction programmes and a framework for the creation of local, regional, national and international networks of women in forestry.

16. Small amounts of funding have been provided to coordinators in Cameroon and Ghana to complete the joint research initiative of FAO/International Union of Forest Research Organizations/Centre for International Forest Research entitled "Mainstreaming gender issues in forestry in Africa". Ten countries, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, have been selected. Additional funds are now required to complete the work in Asia and to hold an international meeting to share results and recommendations.

17. The women major group will collaborate with those organizations and individuals to engage its network of women forestry professionals and bring research results to the attention of Member States of the United Nations Forum on Forests at a formal session or informal side event sometime in 2007 or 2008.

[1] *Time for action: Changing the gender situation in forestry*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Rome, 2006).

B. Coordination of side events at Government-led initiatives, regional meetings and sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests

18. The women major group will coordinate various side events and meetings in conjunction with other major groups at the Government-led initiatives, regional meetings and regular sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests, and in collaboration with other organizations working on gender and forestry issues, such as the Centre for International Forest Research, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, the African Forestry Forum, partners of Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management and others. They will focus on raising awareness of women and gender-related issues and discussions of how to integrate such issue areas into the objectives of the non-legally binding instrument.

C. Coordination of women participants at the World Forestry Congress

19. The women major group and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations working group on gender and forestry research have proposed to the FAO organizers the themes of gender and forests or women, men and forest livelihoods for the thirteenth World Forestry Congress, to be held in Buenos Aires in 2009. The women major group will assure the maximum participation of women at the event; funds from member States and strategic partners are needed for that purpose.

D. Coordination of women in sustainable forest management at the Commission on Sustainable Development

20. The Commission on Sustainable Development will review forest management and biodiversity in 2012 and 2013, including aspects of poverty eradication and gender equality. The women major group will initiate planning for that significant global event in 2010 to assure maximum participation and impact by women; funds from member States and strategic partners are needed for that purpose.

E. Contribution of expertise as a major group member of the Committee of Experts

21. As proposed at the expert group meeting of December 2006, expertise can be contributed to promote and facilitate the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument.

F. Enhanced collaboration and partnership between government and civil society to mainstream gender in forestry in specific countries

22. Some countries, such as Nepal, have achieved exemplary performances in project implementation through the effective collaboration between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies to achieve

maximum participation of women and other deprived groups of forest users in national forestry development programmes. The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation of Nepal collaborated with a national NGO specializing in gender and forestry development to bridge the gender gap by training and mentoring rural and professional women as group promoters and gender focal persons from livestock and forestry departments. That led to a policy shift and the Ministry developed a national strategy for gender mainstreaming action plans until 2015.

23. As an activity of the women major group, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management proposes to build on that unique effort and to strengthen linkages with the Ministry in Nepal by establishing a formal relationship for at least the next three years, to assess the effectiveness of an NGO/Government partnership strategy; identify gaps in the Ministry's efforts in gender mainstreaming in programmes and organizational aspects; and make recommendations.

24. The outcome of the partnership will be a multimedia presentation that highlights the added value of gender mainstreaming to the sustainable forest management work of government forestry and related sector agencies. It will be presented at a session of the United Nations Forum on Forests and distributed to Member States of the United Nations Forum on Forests in the form of a CD-ROM.

25. Similar partnerships between the women major group and the Governments of South Africa and the Philippines are under discussion.

IV. General recommendations for women in sustainable forest management

26. **In addition to those specific plans for implementation of the non-legally binding instrument, the women major group would like to make the following general recommendations**:

(a) **Capacity-building for women's leadership at all levels, for community and professional women**;

(b) **Multisectoral approaches, to meet women's needs**;

(c) **Gender-mainstreaming skills and expertise within all forest-related institutions, including universities, international organizations, national forest departments and ministries**;

(d) **Pilot projects and case studies, to document the positive impacts of engaging women in poverty-addressing sustainable forest management initiatives**;

(e) **Resources to strengthen women's capacity-building initiatives. These programmes are currently handicapped by grossly inadequate resources**;

(f) **A gender mainstreaming support group of the women major group, to provide technical support in gender mainstreaming in forestry to Member States**;

(g) Allocations in the Secretariat's budget, specifically dealing with gender equality and women's participation, to assure that policy directives are implemented;

(h) Partnerships between Governments and civil society and with regional and global organizations, specialized in gender mainstreaming, to assure the implementation of gender-sensitive sustainable forest management initiatives. Pilot projects and case studies are still needed to document the positive impacts of engaging women in poverty-addressing sustainable forest management initiatives.